Renaissance Recorder Players

by David Lasocki

What do you know about the recorder in the Renaissance? You have probably heard of the major treatises that deal with the instrument: Virdung, Agricola, Ganassi, Jambe de Fer, and later Praetorius. You may also know that there were several types of recorder in the Renaissance, all different from Baroque recorders. And from Anthony Rowland-Jones’s fine articles in American Recorder, you may also be familiar with some of our instrument’s symbolism and associations during this period.

But until relatively recently, none of us have known much about the musicians who played the recorder during the Renaissance: who they were, where they played, what they played, and what kinds of lives they led. Twenty years ago, I wrote my doctoral dissertation on recorder players in England in the Renaissance and Baroque periods, later turning some of that material into a book on the Bassano family and my share of a biographical dictionary of English Court musicians.

Last summer, I was asked to give a lecture on “Tracing the Lives of Players and Makers” at an international symposium on the Renaissance flute and recorder consort in Utrecht, sponsored by STIMU, the Dutch early-music foundation. Preparing for this lecture gave me the incentive to expand my research beyond England to cover the European continent and even part of Latin America.

The lecture, an expanded version of which should be published later this year in the proceedings of the symposium, was framed around a series of general questions about the lives of players. In the present article, I have a different emphasis: to share with you my findings about the life and work of some interesting individual Renaissance recorder players, giving more space to those to whom little attention has been paid before. I will discuss only professionals, saving the equally fascinating subject of amateurs for another day. Throughout, I try to consider the wider implications of recorder players for our understanding of the instrument’s Renaissance history.

Conrad Paumann

In the Middle Ages and early Renaissance, instruments were often classified into haut (or loud) and bas (or soft), depending upon their volume. The recorder, being a soft instrument, although not yet explicitly called a flauto dolce or flûte douce, belonged in the bas category.

The most famous bas player in the 15th century was a blind man: Conrad Paumann (c. 1410–1473), also recognized as the most distinguished German composer of his age, hard as that may be for us to appreciate since most of his compositions have been lost. In 1447, he was appointed to the post of portative organ player in the civic organ/lute duo in his native Nuremberg. A poem written the same year by Hans Rosenplüt immediately recognized Paumann as “a master above all masters” (ein Meyster ob allen Meystern).

Only three years later, to the dismay of the Nuremberg authorities, he was lured away, to the Court of Duke Albrecht III of Bavaria-Munich, where he remained for the rest of his life.

Evidently, Paumann played the organ or lute by himself, or sometimes joined in with the Court lute duo. When he visited Augsburg in 1455 and 1457, he was noted as a “master” lutenist. Tintorius (De inventione et usu musicae, 1487) believed him to have been one of the originators of playing the lute polyphonically, and Virdung (1511) ascribed to him the invention of German lute tablature. He was in demand throughout Bavaria as an organist, organ teacher, and evaluator of organs. On his many travels later in life, he astonished kings and dukes with his powers of improvisation, being showered with gifts and offers of employment.

Paumann was buried outside the Church of Our Lady in Munich, where an epitaph, now inside the church, shows him playing the portative organ and surrounded by a lute and what we may assume are his other main instruments: harp, fiddle, and recorder (see Figure 1). Yet two accounts of him indicate that he also played some loud instruments. One chronicler described him as being able to play “on organ, lute, [other] plucked string instruments, fiddle, recorder, pipe, and trombone, and on all musical instruments.” And a report of him on tour in Mantua in 1470 marveled that this blind man, who “played every instrument . . . if he heard a verse or a song . . . knew how to play it [by ear] either on the organ, or the bagpipe, or on plucked string instruments, or on the harp, or on the shawm.”
The records are silent about how Paumann used the recorder. Did he play it solo, like the 17th-century blind musician Jacob van Eyck? Did he join in a trio with lute and fiddle, as depicted in some 15th-century paintings? Or did he and his colleagues form a recorder consort, as we are about to see in other places? Perhaps further research will bring us closer to the answer.

15th-Century Bruges

Surprisingly, the recorder seems to have been found more often in the hands of haut musicians who worked at courts or for cities and towns, even at the beginning of the 15th century. In 1426, Duke Philip the Good of Burgundy paid the instrument-maker Loys Willay, “living in Bruges,” a large sum of money “due to him for four large instruments de menestrels, four doucaines, and four fleustes, all fitted out with leather cases and with chests, which Monseigneur ... has had taken and bought from him to send to the Marquise of Ferrara.” What were these instruments and what might have occasioned the gift?

The “minstrel instruments” are likely to have been a set of shawms, the most common instruments played by minstrels everywhere during this period. Doucaine, more frequently spelled doucaine, seems to have been a cylindrical reed instrument, an early, capless crumhorn.

The unqualified word fleuste seems to have indicated recorder from the end of the 14th century (as far back, in fact, as we can be sure of the instrument’s existence).

Hennequin Copettrippe, who had played the trumpet and the trompette des menestrels (slide trumpet) at the Burgundy Court, moved on to the Court of Ferrara around 1422. Jeanne Marix, writing in 1939, suggested plausibly that the imper-
Charles VII of France offered in payment of his debts to Ferdinand of Aragon in 1426.

By 1436, the younger Verdelet—probably the one known to Martin le France—seems to have been in the service of the duke of Bourbon when he fell ill at the Peace of Arras, then died soon afterwards. No doubt this pattern of players being sent around to different masters spread the cause of recorder-playing from country to country.

If the evidence for minstrels playing the recorder in the early 15th century is indirect, for the later part of the century it is direct and also more plentiful. In the same city of Bruges that produced Willay, the earliest recorder maker known to us by name, Duke Charles the Bold of Burgundy was married to Margaret of York in 1468. Reinhard Strohm, in his book *Music in Late Medieval Bruges*, has written of this occasion that “The minstrels and court singers of the town worked side by side with the court minstrels and those of the English delegation.”

Yet we know from the researches of Marix and Barbara Haggh that the number of minstrels at the Burgundian Court had dwindled towards the end of the reign of Philip the Good (d. 1467), to the point that in 1468 only one was left, a man named Jacques de Rectre, player of the slide trumpet, and even he had previously been listed as a field trumpeter. This suggests that the bulk of the instrumental music at the wedding was played by the Bruges city minstrels.

A series of suppers was held every day for ten days, at which music was performed by musicians disguised as animals. At one supper there appeared “four wolves having recorders in their paws, and the said wolves started to play a chanson.” As Isabelle Cazeaux has noted: “The wolves’ feat anticipates Attainmann’s *Vingt et sept chansons musicales a quatre* (1533), playable on flutes [and recorders], by more than half a century, and shows that although scribes did not specifically say so, 15th-century motets and chansons were already ‘convenables tant a la voix comme aux instruments’ [suitable both for the voice and for instruments].”

What do we know of the Bruges minstrels at this time? Fortunately, more than about those of any other 15th-century city.

In 1485–86, on the city’s behalf, Pavillon and Willemartaet began teaching the recorder in their own homes to four “youngsters.” When Willemartaet died only about a year later, Pavillon continued teaching two of the boys for at least two more years. This arrangement is puzzling, since only recorders are mentioned. A normal apprenticeship would have also included shawms and trombones, perhaps also trumpets. Since the boys were housed in the minstrels’ homes, the most likely explanation is that they had full apprenticeships and the term “recorders” was being used as shorthand for “wind instruments.” Still, recorders do seem to have been especially important in Bruges, as confirmed by a reference to the city minstrel “players of recorders and shawms,” rather than the standard shawms and trombones, when they visited the court of Margaret of Austria in 1522–23.

Anthuenis Pavillon belonged to a family of minstrels. He was the son of Gillis Pavillon, who served in Bruges between 1456 and 1479 and was himself the son of a Gillis, said to be of Busegnies in Hene-gauwe (now the village of Busegnies-sur-Roc in the French-speaking province of Hainault).

Anthuenis became a citizen of Bruges in 1475. (It is curious that this was necessary, since his father was already a citizen.) He is said in the citizenship record to be from “Vaulx, land of Gyyse in France” (probably Vaulx en Velin, in Normandy), so perhaps he had served an apprenticeship elsewhere, or had at least moved away from Bruges after training with his father.

In 1479, Anthuenis was paid for traveling to “Namur, Maastricht, Cologne, and elsewhere” to search for a replacement for his father, who had just died. This record shows he had become one of the city minstrels himself. In 1496–97, he was joined by Liefraet Pavillon, presumably his son, who had replaced Anthuenis van der Beke. Anthuenis Pavillon is last mentioned in the city’s records in 1510.

Adriaen Willemartaet likewise came from a minstrel family. In 1459, his father Nycais (Nicasius) and his uncle Pierre were among the five minstrels of the count of Saint-Pol who were given a payment for playing before the duke of Burgundy in 1459. Nycais died around 1466, when Gillis Pavillon was appointed tutor of his minor children in Bruges. Perhaps not coincidentally, Adriaen became a citizen of Bruges the same year, when he was described as coming from “Arcane in Henguwen” (Arc-Ainières in Hainault, between Tornai and Kortrijk), and presumably received his appointment in the city minstrel.

Another Willemartaet, Hanin, was among the minstrels of the count of Estampes who received a New Year’s gift in Brussels in 1461. Jehan Willemartaet, perhaps Adriaen’s brother, joined the minstrels of the duke of Burgundy in 1470, followed by Lussart Pavillon, perhaps Anthuenis’s brother, in 1473. (They stayed at the court until at least 1475, after which the records peter out.) An Adriaen “Wilmorth” or “Willene”—clearly Willemartaet—turns up at the English Court in 1503 as an apprentice of a Flemish wind player named Guillian van der Bergh (who, as we shall see below, played the recorder).

The Bruges minstrels generally played outside or facing the outdoors. They took part in two important annual processions: first, that to celebrate the relic of the Holy Blood on the feast of the Invention of the Cross (May 3). This last coincided with the beginning of the secular May Fair, the
Giovanni himself knew

enough about art that in

1504 he was one of the

11 Florentine citizens

chosen as a jury to decide

on the placement of

Michelangelo's David.

In 1497, he was given a full place again, and
now played soprano and contra basso parts. He was charged with illegally buying
the place from another member, but the
charges were later dropped.

At the age of 63, Giovanni retired, the
official reason being that he was consid-
ered too old for the daily obligations of the
job. Benvenuto claims that his father was
actually pensioned off because he was un-
willing to go to Rome to serve Cardinal
Giovanni de' Medici, who had just be-
come Pope Leo X. In 1527, Giovanni died
of the plague.

We owe many of these juicy details to
Benvenuto's fame as an artist. If he had re-
mained a player, we would probably know
less about him than we now know about
his father. In any case, it seems to have
been Giovanni's perhaps enforced retire-
ment that lost Benvenuto the right to suc-
ceed his father in the pifferi, giving him
added incentive to pursue the art of gold-
smithing rather than music.
Example 1. Tandernaken by Jacob Obrecht, from Harmonice musices odhecaton (Venice: Petrucci, 1501), ff. 75–76 (clefs: C2, C4, F4)

A MIDI playback of this piece and an enlarged version more suitable for ensemble playing are available in Recorder On-Line at <www.recorderonline.org>. ARS members may make photocopies of this music for their own use.
Between 1515 and 1517, Nagel and the famous music copyist Petrus Alamire served as spies for Henry VIII of England.

Hans Nagel: London and the Low Countries

The origins of our next player, Hans Nagel (d. 1531–32), are uncertain, as Nagel was a common name in the Low Countries. He may have been German: one of the two sons of another Hans Nagel who served in the civic ensemble of Leipzig between 1479 and 1483.

The first record that clearly relates to our Hans dates from 1501, when he was among the “sackbuts” of Henry VII of England when the king made a state visit to Philip the Fair, duke of Burgundy, in Brussels. Unfortunately, the English accounts during the preceding years do not give the names of all the members of this ensemble, so we do not know exactly when Nagel arrived in London. The “sackbuts” of the English Court in fact played either shawm or trombone, and one of them, a Fleming called Guillaume van der Burgh, was paid for providing “new recorders,” presumably for himself and his colleagues, in 1501.

Nagel left England in 1504 and joined the retinue of Philip the Fair. Curiously, this move soon brought him back to England, when Philip’s fleet was battered in a storm on its way to Spain in 1506 and took refuge in an English harbor. Philip then made a state visit of no fewer than three months to the English Court, and his minstrels were rewarded by Henry VII.

Philip did go on to Spain later that year, taking control of the kingdom of Castille, but lived less than a month to enjoy it. Nagel may perhaps have stayed on for a while in the service of the widowed queen, although that would surely have been uncomfortable, as her mental instability earned her the nickname “Mad Joan.”

By 1508–09, Nagel had moved back to the Low Countries, where he was paid in Mechelen as piper vander stad (city wind player) for “certain services done for the city.” He appears on the pay records of the civic ensemble through 1518–19, always being distinguished from his colleagues by the title “master,” which may mean he was the leader. In 1510–11, the city paid him for acquiring a case of recorders, doubtless for the ensemble’s use.

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Nagel may actually have been doing double duty, for he was paid in 1509, on command of Margaret of Austria, for serving daily in the court chapel of the minor Archduke Charles of Burgundy, located in Mechelen. (He and another trombonist, Jan Van Winckel, played along with the singers in the polyphonic offices and masses.)

While in Mechelen, between 1515 and 1517, Nagel and the famous music copyist Petrus Alamire served as spies for Henry VIII of England, helping to gather information about Richard de la Pole, exiled pretender to the English throne. The king was rightly concerned that Pole would attack England, especially when in March 1516 he apparently obtained from Francis I of France a promise of support for his title. Therefore the English Court tried to keep track of Pole’s movements.

Nagel had apparently had some earlier dealings with Pole that were considered treasonable in England, and he now asked for and was granted an amnesty. Despite that, Henry VIII was unsuccessful in his attempt to entice Nagel back to England as a court musician (but did succeed with some of his trombone-playing colleagues, including Van Winckel). Eventually, the surviving diplomatic correspondence contains a claim by an informant that Alamire and Nagel were spies for Pole, or in other words double agents, and the Court dropped them soon after that.

At some point after 1518–19 that cannot be established because of missing records, Nagel moved to Antwerp and joined the staatspeelieden (civic ensemble) there. He did become a citizen of Antwerp in 1528–29 and is listed in the first preserved accounts of the civic musicians in 1530.

By the time the city made an inventory of its instruments in October 1532, Nagel had died. The extent of these instruments, divided among three of the musicians, is remarkable: Peeter Baninck had “a case with twelve new recorders ... a case of new large crumhorns, eleven altogether, and ... a soprano and a tenor shawm.” Tielman Susato (see below) had “another case with eight crumhorns ... another case with nine recorders ... also, two trombones and a field trumpet ... and ... a tenor pipe [shawm].” Jan de Brasser had “a trombone that Jan [i.e., Hans] Nagel had and ... a case with seven recorders; Hans Nagel had eight but one was lost at his home: a tenor [crossed out] a soprano.” This inventory confirms that Nagel played the trombone and that, as in London and Mechelen, he and his colleagues played a consort of recorders.

Other cases and sets of recorders are mentioned in inventories and purchases in the Low Countries and Italy before 1532. And twice a number of recorders is specified without saying whether they constituted a set: six recorders, Mechelen, 1508–09; eight recorders, Nuremberg,
Tielman Susato

worked as a music calligrapher at Onze-ensemble, they must have drawn on these instruments that larger sizes were made. For sessions. They were also often employed by consorts.

Tielman Susato. Born in Soest in the region of Cologne (thus the last name he in the church with singers on high feast days. The number of musicians for the procession and to play the trumpet (1531) and for two trumpets, a tenor and a bass, “bought for the city made payments to Susato for playing the contrabass part.”

Sylvestro Ganassi

Surprisingly little has been published about the life of Sylvestro di Ganassi dal Fontego, one of the most famous names in the history of the recorder. His date of birth is given in reference books with confidence as 1492, presumably based on his statement in his second treatise for the violin, Lettione seconda pur della pratica di sonare il violone d’arco da tasti (1543), that “of the 51 years I have encountered, I have had the time to study for at most five years.” Fifty-one certainly sounds more like an accurate number than, say, 50 would have been, but even so we can only say that he was born in 1491 or 92.

Under the name “Silvestro Antonij” he was hired as a piffero of the Doge of Venice in June 1517 to replace one Melchiorre, deceased, who had played the contra alto part in the ensemble. (As in Florence, the Venetian ensemble specialized in parts-ranges.) Ganassi was said to be living at that time “close to the government grana-ry near the Rialto” (ad fonticum Farine in Rivodoto ad tria capita). This storehouse (fontego in Italian) gave rise to his appellation “dal Fontego”—and in turn, of course, to the name of his famous recorder treatise, Opera intitulata Fontegara [Work entitled “Fontegara”] (Venice, 1535). The Antonio appended to his name in the hiring record no doubt refers to his father.

About his origins, Ganassi wrote in the introduction to his first treatise for the viol, Regola rubertina: Regola che insegna sonar de viola darchio tastada (Venice, 1542): “In ancient histories, we find the philosopher giving thanks to God for three things: first, that he was a Greek not a barbarian; second, that he was a rational being and not an irrational one; and third, that he was a man and not a woman. I, too,
Example 2. “Je my levay par ung matin” by Jean Descaudain, from Vingt et six chansons musicales & nouuelles a cincq (Antwerp: Thielman Susato, [1543]); superius, contratenor, tenor, bassus, all f. vv (clefs: C1, C4, C4, F4)

A MIDI playback of this piece and an enlarged version more suitable for ensemble playing are available in Recorder On-Line at <www.recorderonline.org>. ARS members may make photocopies of this music for their own use.
thank God for three things: first, that I am of Bergamasque ancestry; second, I was born in the city of Venice; third, I am a Christian and not a pagan. I will tell you the reason why: this Lombard ancestry endowed me with ability; the greatness of the Venetian homeland made me studious; and faith made me work for things useful to body and soul.” (The title of this treatise, like that of Fontegara, is a pun: the work is dedicated to Ruberto Strozzi, a Florentine nobleman and patron of the early madrigal, whom Ganassi claims as his former student.)

We know little about Ganassi’s later life. Francesco Sansovino’s Diagolo di tutte le cose notabili che sono in Venetia [Dialog on all the notable things in Venice] (1560) singles out “Sylvestro dal Fontego” as one of the musicians “of excellence” in the city. He is presumably the “Sylvestro dal Cornetto” (of the cornett) who rented a volta (storeroom or warehouse) in Venice in 1566 for an annual rent of 17 ducati. The date of his death is unknown.

Ganassi’s treatises reveal a few more personal details about him. In Lettione seconda he wrote to his readers, touchingly: “even though the shape of my body is abundant in flesh, it does not mean that because of this abundance I will be forced to keep my eyes closed throughout my discussion.” On the title page he describes himself as “desirous in [presumably a student of] the visual arts.” He engraved and printed all his treatises himself.

We do know something about Ganassi’s relatives. A family of wind musicians who belonged to the Concerto Palatino in Bologna were Ganassis. The first, Zaccaria da Venezia, trombonist (who served 1513–28), may have been Sylvestro’s brother. (If this is true, then their father is likely to have been a wind musician, too.)

There is an explicit connection between Zaccaria and the Bassano family: while he temporarily served the Pope in 1519–21, he was replaced by Alvise Bassano, the eldest son of Jeronimo, the patriarch of the family (himself a member of the pifferi del Doge and therefore surely acquainted with Sylvestro). Zaccaria had two sons: Giovannino de Zaccaria (served 1544–52) and Vincentio da Zaccaria (served 1531–81), who was the permanent replacement for his father and is explicitly called “Vincenti Giunasi” in one record. Vincentio’s son, Alphonso (served 1561–1610), was generally known as Ganassi. A further Ganassi, Alessandro, probably a member of the next generation, served 1622–48.

There is one other relevant record about the family: a lawyer called “Antonius de Ganassisi a fontico,” perhaps Sylvestro’s son, is mentioned in a Venetian document of 1549.

Ganassi’s Fontegara is at once the most revealing and the most frustrating of all recorder treatises, tantalizing us with hints of an astonishingly well-developed style of playing. (Please note that I have made my own translations of all of Ganassi’s words, rather than relying on standard published translations, which bear only an approximate relationship to the original text.) The author declares that the aim of the instrumentalist is to learn from and imitate the human voice, using the breath, articulation, and fingering. He then describes the means we can use to achieve fine playing: good breath control, alternative fingerings, a variety of articulations (three basic kinds of syllable, te che, te re, and le re), and extensive use of trills and divisions. Unfortunately, he gives no examples of musical contexts in which these techniques were used, and we cannot hear the “capable and expert” (sufficente & perito) 16th-century singer he holds up as a model.

From all this evidence, it is clear that Ganassi had amateur musicians in mind for all three treatises.

According to Ganassi, playing “with artifice”—or, in other words, artistically—has three essential interdependent elements. The first is imitatione (imitation, specifically of the voice), achieved by means of dynamics in service of the piece’s mood. The second is prontezza (readiness), achieved by varying the breath pressure. The third is galanteria (elegance or grace), achieved by the use of ornaments, “derived fundamentally from the trilling of the fingers on the holes of the recorder.” He mentions trills varying in interval from the “lively and expansive” (vivace e augmentata) expression of the third down to the “sweet or soothing” (suave over placabile) effect of the semitone. The majority of the treatise is taken up with a series of tables of the divisions or passaggi that may be applied to a melodic line.

For what audience did Ganassi write this treatise? In his introduction to Regola rubertina he wrote: “I have taken to heart, as I already did with my other work entitled Fontegara, which taught how to play the recorder and to make diminutions, to set out some of my observations on music for the viol, that is, on the practical method of playing music on the viol, in order that the talent given to me by God be passed on to my neighbor, and smooth the way for those who take delight in this art.” Furthermore, “it happens that in the present day many take delight in the instrumental music of viols, so I have decided to make my work bear fruit in the love toward my neighbor, and I know that it has been useful to me to learn at the right time and place, the same being also true for our neighbor.” On the title page of Lettione seconda, he wrote that the treatise was “a useful work for those who take delight in learning how to play” (opera utilissima a chi se dileta de imparare sonare). A manuscript appendix to Fontegara, consisting of 175 diminutions on a single cadence, was prepared by Ganassi for “a Florentine gentleman” and copied for a nobleman called only Domenico.

From all this evidence, it is clear that Ganassi had amateur musicians in mind for all three treatises. Professionals learned through apprenticeship with a master, in one-on-one instruction, presumably using whatever teaching materials the master could provide. If Ganassi had been targeting professional wind players for Fontegara, he would doubtless have written about the cornett or the shawm, the bread-and-butter instruments of wind bands, rather than the recorder.
The Bassano Family: From Venice to London

In the London branch of the Bassanos, we find an apparently unique instance of players being allowed to specialize in the recorder. In 1531, Henry VIII attracted four Venetian wind players to his "sackbut" ensemble: Alvise, Anthony, Jasper, and John "de Jeronimo." These were none other than four of the sons of Jeronimo Bassano, whom we have already encountered in Venice. They stayed in England only a few years, then returned home.

In 1539–40, the king—who played the recorder himself—attracted them back to England permanently, along with their younger brother Baptista, this time not as shawm and trombone players but as a consort of recorder players. This consort, expanded to six members in 1550, lasted intact until the amalgamation of the three Court wind consorts into one group in 1630—no less than 90 years. Its later members included second- and third-generation Bassanos (Arthur, Anthony II, Augustine, Edward, Henry, Jeronimo II, Lodovico), other foreigners (William Daman and two members of the Lanier family, Alphonso and Clement), and from 1593 onwards some native wind players (Robert Baker I and II, John Hussey, William Noake).

The musicians were on call daily in one of the five "standing houses" of the monarch on the River Thames—Westminster, Greenwich, Richmond, Hampton Court, and Windsor—apparently to play for dances and dinners. Doubtless the consort used instruments made by the Bassanos, who were among the prominent woodwind makers of the age. (For details, see my book on the Bassano family, or my August 1984 article for American Recorder on the Court recorder consort.)

Simone Nodi

The wind band of Siena is first recorded as having recorders in 1547. For our purposes, the most important member of the Sienna pifferi was Simone di Domenico Nodi—that is, Simone Nodi, son of Domenico—who was appointed in 1546, only one year before the first official mention of recorders in the records. He had apparently already been serving as a supernumerary, as five months earlier his meal allowance had been increased. As with many of the pifferi, the trials and tribulations of his life are recorded in some detail. In 1564, he was hauled before the city authorities to explain why he had disobeyed orders to play the cornett alone while his colleagues were absent on one occasion; he must have had a good excuse, because he was absolved of the charge. In 1555, he was ordered to share the gifts and gratuities that he had received from visitors on behalf of the ensemble, and apparently some extra income for freelance work outside the Palace. Ten years later in 1565, Nodi and a colleague, Adriano Mangoni, were among the five pifferi who were successfully sued by a Palace trumpeter and his son for not sharing gratuities. In 1570, Nodi in turn sued the leader of the pifferi, Ascanio Marri, for the same reason. Nodi himself was elected leader in 1575. In 1580, he was ordered to be imprisoned for violating the city's regulations on taking outside employment, and the sentence was even increased because he refused to turn himself in.

In 1565, Nodi was said to be using a room in the Palace for a "school." By 1574, he was living in a house where he had "his own studio or school where he usually teaches his pupils." One of his pupils was Domenico Fei, son of Maestro Bartolomeo Fei, a Siennese barber. Bartolomeo left Nodi the sum of 50 scudi in 1576, "in recognition of many kindnesses shown to Domenico" when Nodi "taught him musical theory and to play instruments." (Domenico had begun serving in the pifferi as a supernumerary the previous year, was hired on half salary in 1578, and resigned in 1591 when his request for a salary increase was denied.) Nodi's successor's successor as leader of the pifferi, Alberto di Francesco Gregori, was ordered to open a school in 1603, "above all because of the great necessity of renewing and maintaining a school of music in the Palace, as was the custom in the past, and of promoting young players from it."

Nodi retired on full salary in 1601 and died the following year. His heirs returned to the palace "two cases of recorders, one black and the other yellowish; a case of flutes; (and) another case of six sordini (sorduns?)," all of which had been issued to him for the use of the pifferi.

The Gans Family

The Ganses present a fascinating case of wind players involved with the recorder at several levels. Wolff Gans joined the Stadtpfeifer (city band) of Augsburg in 1526 and stayed there for eight years. At that point he took some kind of leave of absence, perhaps engineered through the imperial household, to work for Queen Mary of Hungary, who did not in fact live in Hungary but was the regent of The Netherlands and based in Brussels. In 1535, Gans was one of three "shawn players" paid "for having come from Germany to the service of the Queen."

He also received a payment "for several instruments of music made in Augsburg and delivered to the Queen; among others, three recorders, including one the height of a man, for the contrabass part; one for the tenor; and one for the superius; another large and one medium recorder; also eight flutes ...." Clearly, Gans was helping to build up the collection of woodwinds at the disposal of Queen Mary's band, which then consisted of two cornettists, three shawn players, and a trombonist.
We do not know of any woodwind makers in Augsburg in the 16th century, so Gans is much more likely to have bought the instruments in or around that city. There are surviving great bass recorders from this period made by Hans Rauch in Schrattenbach and probably Sigmund Schnitzer I in Nuremberg; both cities are reasonably close to Augsburg. (Sigmund was praised, in a book published in Nuremberg in 1547, especially for his large sizes of woodwind instruments, including recorders.) In 1536, Gans was described not only as shawmist but also “archer of the Queen’s corps.”

In 1538, however, Gans returned to the Augsburg Stadtpfeifer and stayed there for the rest of his life, the last payment being made to him in 1557. An inventory of the band’s instruments in 1540 included a case of five recorders (two descant, two tenor, one bass) and a case of four flutes (three tenor, one bass), both “lost” from the city’s dance house, presumably stolen. We may be suspicious that Gans had sold the instruments to Queen Mary, but the numbers and sizes of instruments do not match. A member of the band named Gans (who had a treble shawm, a bass shawm with one key, and a case of six crumhorns), Jorg Prenner (a tenor shawm), and Hanns Trexel (five schreyerpfeifen), along with Leupolt Turmer (who is said to have had a trombone at St. Peter’s Tower, the city’s watchtower; perhaps he also used the instrument to play with his colleagues when he was not needed at the tower). Once again, we can see the range of wind instruments a city could provide for its band. We may suppose that the musicians owned recorders and flutes, since the city had not replaced the lost ones.

Wolff Gans wrote of his sons, Sebastian and Wolfgang, that they “were educated in music from their early youth, and learned diligently, and moreover they have been in other countries with [music] masters; much was spent on them, so they—thank God ... have learned and understood more than other Stadtpfeifer.” Around 1550, one of them, apparently Wolfgang, had been sent “to Ferrara for two whole years at my own expense.” When Wolfgang returned in February 1552, Wolff applied for him to have the place in the band just vacated by Wolff Perger. Noting in passing that Wolfgang was also an organist and composer, Wolff asked the city to hire him “because my colleagues and I well need a good cornettist, as in my sickness I am no longer capable of playing the cornett, but must accept and be responsible for another part.”

What the Ganses did not know was that the city had already made a deal with Prenner, who had been playing in the tower of St. Stephen’s Cathedral in Vienna for five years, to swap places with Perger. In December that year, Wolfgang wrote a complaint that the city magistrate had denied his request for a salary for the autumn quarter, noting that on his return from Italy he had served for five months without salary and he had now used up the money that his father gave him during his Italian stay. Since Wolfgang in fact never appears on the payroll, he must not have been hired permanently.

Wolfgang therefore had no post, and the Gans family were put in a difficult financial situation. The solution they adopted emerged from an infamous dispute between Wolff and his colleagues in the Stadtpfeifer three years later, in 1555—in which, among other things, Wolff claimed that Prenner tried to hit Wolfgang on the head with a large shawm (and Prenner counterclaimed that he merely gestured with the instrument).

Amid all the angry posturing on both sides, several interesting facts emerge. Wolff claims he “not only taught the others [his colleagues] but also established the music under the Stadtpfeifer.” (The word music here may refer to some special configuration of instruments or parts, as the band had been established since the 14th century.)

Wolff claimed that Prenner tried to hit Wolfgang on the head with a large shawm...

Because of some previous quarreling, the city lords had ordered in 1554 that all the Stadtpfeifer “live together peacefully and like good colleagues.” For several years, the band had been rehearsing together three times a week. Wolff decided to stop playing with the Stadtpfeifer and sent a substitute: he says, an outside trombone player; Prenner says, “only his apprentice and inexperienced in playing,” so they had to hire someone better.

Then Wolff formed his own band with his sons to do freelance work. Not to be outdone, his colleagues Prenner, Hans Trexel, and his son of the same name, teamed up with Melchior Neusidler (1521–90), the celebrated composer and lutenist, who had moved to Augsburg a few years earlier. Under Neusidler’s leadership they formed a group to play stille Musica—apparently chamber music involving lute with some soft instruments, such as strings, flutes, or recorders—for prominent citizens.

The city’s response to the dispute, in January 1556, was to summon all the Stadtpfeifer, admonish them to keep the peace, and make them take an oath to “not do anything offensive to each other or against the law.” Incidentally, one of Prenner’s complaints, that the Ganses sometimes showed up “without books,” demonstrates that it was now considered standard for wind musicians to play from music, whereas in the 15th century they had almost always played from memory.

Both of Wolff’s sons did eventually move on from Augsburg to the same place, the Court of Baden-Württemberg in Stuttgart. Sebastian was hired first, in 1566, and the Court immediately bought him a trombone “of an especially good kind and thoroughly useful for the music of the Court ensemble.” He survived a long illness in 1570.

Wolfgang followed him to the Court in 1573. By 1575, they had achieved such a reputation that a local poet, Nicodemus Frischlin, in a poem about the first marriage of Duke Ludwig, devoted a stanza to them:

Wolff Gansen ich hie nennen muß
Weil er ist so ein Musicus
Mit sein Bruder zu dieser frist
Fast der berühmst Instrumentist
Auf Pfeiffen, Zinkchen so gerad
Den weitesten berufjetz hat
Und sunst auf manchem Instrument
Wie der weist, der Wolff Gansen kent.

[I must name Wolfgang Gans here because he is such a fine musician. With his brother at this time / almost the most famous instrumentalist / On pipes and straight cornets / he has a widespread reputation / as well as on many another instrument. That’s what everybody knows who knows Wolfgang Gans.]

Ironically, Neusidler applied unsuccessfully for a post in Stuttgart the following year. The Gans brothers were highly paid (especially Wolfgang, who also received a large clothing allowance). They were consulted about hiring decisions and allowed to select instrumentalists without asking the Kapellmeister.
In 1572, Sebastian took two "singing boys" from the court chapel as apprentices, whom "he should teach and instruct on instruments." Over the next 14 years, he took five more apprentices for periods set between two and six years. These periods are short in comparison with those elsewhere (e.g., in London, a minimum of seven years), and that may have led to trouble. Christoph Frey, who had been apprenticed to Sebastian for six years but released after only 2-1/4 years, became a Court Heerpauker (timpani player). One of Frey's own apprentices, Ulrich Beck, then had to petition the Court to be allowed to learn "other instruments such as cornets, trombones, and the like," presumably because Frey was not competent to teach him.

In 1574, Sebastian was sent to purchase instruments for the Stuttgart Court in Munich, Augsburg, and Ulm. and the following year he brought violin strings from Ulm. In 1576, he was paid for having bought a case "containing 31 flutes and pipes of all kinds" and for getting "several part-books" bound.

Six years later, he went with the Court woodwind maker Samuel Baisch to Wiesensteig, so that they could learn "the finishing of Kolonen and the cutting of their mouthpieces (reeds?)" from the pfeifenmacher Christof Frey (not to be confused with Gans's apprentice). The sources relating to these Kolonen or Kolonnen in Stuttgart do not make absolutely clear whether the instruments were sor-duns, a type of double-reed instrument in column form (as suggested by their high price and the word "mouthpieces"), or columnar recorders. In 1584, Sebastian had a goldsmith coat three cornetts with tin, then gild them and fit them with bosses; the cost of this little operation brought him a sharp order not to do anything in future without permission.

Sebastian died in December 1586. His widow, Susanna, sold to the Court a large collection of instruments that he had presumably played: two trumpets, three curved bass cornets, six straight cornets, "a case of seven recorders and a flute, all made by the Netherlands pfeifenmacher" (the Court woodwind maker Melchior Bil- liggheim), a case of eight brown and eight yellow flutes, a case of four boxwood flutes made in Antwerp (three tenors and a bass), a case of three flutes (a two-part tenor and two two-part basses), a case of four brown flutes (the two larger ones made in two parts), and a case of two bent bass flutes. It is astonishing that in Stuttgart, which had the largest instrument collection of any European court or city, one of the players still had so many instruments of his own.

Wolfgang Gans was also paid for providing a number of instruments for the Court between 1574 and 1589: a case of flutes and dulcians, a virginal, a cornett, a quart trombone, and a case of six flutes. As a composer, he received payments for providing a number of pieces for the Court—a four-part mass, unspecified compositions, two songs (one four-part, one eight-part), and another song—as well as psalms for the local monastery.

In 1578, he was sent to Augsburg to see "whether the Fugger instruments were for sale." This was presumably the famous collection of Raimund Fugger, which was in fact taken over by Fugger's brother Ulrich the following year.

Only two apprentices of Wolfgang's are mentioned in the records, one of them his own son, also named Wolfgang (1579), whom he was "to teach and intimately instruct on instruments" for five years; after being freed, this son asked for permission to move to Rome but instead was hired as Court organist. By 1589, Wolfgang was described as "old and not capable much longer, therefore to be released and other possibilities to be thought of" for the Court band. The following year he was paid for no fewer than eight settings of the Magnificat, perhaps his own, which he had "engrossed" (or written fair copies of), so he did have some capability left. He died on August 28, 1598.

The wind players at the Stuttgart Court were expected to be proficient on a wide variety of instruments. A record for Hans Eckhardt's apprenticeship to Georg Straal, "trumpeter and instrumentalist" at the Court (1592), mentions that he was taught "members of the violin family, cornets, recorders, flutes, viol, trombones, crumhorns, small bagpipes, and trumpets."

Jonas Depensee
The 16th century produced some other striking cases of multi-instrumentalism. In 1540, three musicians from Nuremberg—Wolfgang Hofmann, Hans Thalmann, and Symon Grebmaier—applied unsuccessfully to join the town band of Rothenburg ob der Tauber, claiming they could play "trombones, cornetts, flutes, schreyerpfeifen, pipe and tabor, crumhorns, shawms, recorders, stringed instruments, organ, lutes." In the same year, a successful applicant described himself as: "being adept in and able to play stringed instruments, flutes and other woodwind instruments nowadays common, also shawms, trombones, crumhorns."

The leader of a company of musicians, Giovanni Pietro Rizeffo, in seeking employment from the duke of Parma in 1546, claimed that all six musicians in his company could play the trumpet, trombone, shawm, cornett, cornemuse, recorder, flute, and violin; were all excellent at improvising from a vocal part; and could sing excellently too, having quite good voices.

An interesting case is Jonas Depensee from Stralsund in Estonia, who wrote to the town of Reval in 1587 that he was able to play "trombones, cornetts, dulcians, crumhorns, flutes, recorders, treble, tenor, and bass shawms, and violins, in correct musical style, [for pieces] in four or five parts." In a 1607 letter, Depensee claimed that his son Andreas, who had apprenticed with him, was "first, a good trumpeter, second, a good cornett player, third, plays a good discant part on the violon, blows a good flute, dulcian, quart, alto, and tenor trombones: in sum, wellnigh perfect on all kinds of instruments." Depensee also lists "the instruments that I can now make over to him and, praise God, he can all use: trombones and cornetts, among them a good quart trombone; second, a consort of dulcians; third, a consort of large and small shawms; fourth, a consort of large [? ] cornetts; fifth, a consort of crumhorns; sixth, a consort of flutes; seventh, a consort of recorders; eighth, a consort of violins; so that he can change between eight kinds of instruments and use five and six or eight voices."

What all such lists confirm is that recorders were standard equipment for the 16th-century town musician.
Main Sources
(for reference and further reading)

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